

THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

1-33. (Canceled)

34. (Currently amended) A method of treating meat, comprising: identifying meat in a dark-cutting carcass by evaluating grading pH and color, and after onset of rigor mortis contacting said meat derived from said dark-cutting carcass with an amount of at least one pH-lowering agent, wherein the meat has a grading pH and grading color of a dark burgundy/purple, and the amount of pH-lowering agent is sufficient to lower the pH and to lighten the color from the grading color of a dark burgundy/purple to a red color of at least a portion of said meat.

35. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 34, wherein the at least one pH-lowering agent comprises at least one acidulant.

36. (Canceled)

37. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 35, wherein the grading pH ranges from about 6.3 to about 6.7.

38. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 37, wherein the at least one acidulant comprises one or more of organic acids, GDL, sodium acid sulfate, and calcium sulfate.

39. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 38, wherein the process further includes tumbling said meat.

40. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 34, wherein said contacting comprises injecting said meat with a brine solution comprising said at least one pH-lowering agent.

41. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 34, wherein said contacting comprises marinating said meat in a brine solution comprising said at least one pH-lowering agent.

42. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 34, further comprising a drip/rest period.

43. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 34, further comprising packaging said meat.

44. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 34, wherein said at least one pH-lowering agent comprises an encapsulated form.

45. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 34, further comprising contacting said meat with a buffering agent.

46. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 45, wherein the amount of said buffering agent is sufficient to eliminate or reduce residual activity of at least one of said at least one pH-lowering agents in said meat.

47. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 45, wherein said buffering agent comprises a phosphate solution.

48. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 34, further comprising contacting said meat with one or more ingredients suitable for accelerating the action of at least one of said at least one pH-lowering agents.

49. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 48, wherein the one or more ingredients suitable for accelerating the action of at least one of said at least one pH-lowering agents comprises one or more of erythorbate and ascorbic acid.

50. (Currently amended) A method of treating meat, comprising: identifying a bovine carcass as a dark-cutting bovine carcass by evaluating grading pH and color and after onset of rigor mortis contacting meat derived from said dark-cutting bovine carcass with an amount of at least one pH-lowering agent, wherein the meat has a grading pH and grading color of a dark burgundy/purple, and the amount of pH-lowering agent is sufficient to lower the pH and to lighten the color from the grading color of a dark burgundy/purple to a red color of at least a portion of said meat.

51. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 50, wherein the at least one pH-lowering agent comprises at least one acidulant.

52. (Canceled)

53. (Original) A method according to claim 50, wherein the grading pH ranges from about 6.3 to about 6.7.

54. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 51, wherein the at least one acidulant comprises one or more of organic acids, GDL, sodium acid sulfate, and calcium sulfate.

55. (Original) A method according to claim 53, wherein the process further includes tumbling said meat.

56. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 50, wherein said contacting comprises injecting said meat with a solution comprising said at least one pH-lowering agent.

57. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 50, wherein said contacting comprises marinating said meat in a solution comprising said at least one pH-lowering agent.

58. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 50, further comprising a drip/rest period.

59. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 50, further comprising packaging said meat prior to contacting said meat with said pH-lowering agent.

60. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 50, further comprising packaging said meat after contacting said meat with said pH-lowering agent.

61. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 50, wherein said at least one pH-lowering agent comprises an encapsulated form.

62. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 50, further comprising contacting said meat with a buffering agent.

63. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 62, wherein the amount of said buffering agent is sufficient to stabilize the pH in said meat at a pH below the grading pH.

64. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 62, wherein said buffering agent comprises a phosphate solution.

65. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 50, further comprising contacting said meat with one or more ingredients suitable for accelerating the action of at least one of said at least one pH-lowering agents.

66. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 64, wherin the one or more ingredients suitable for accelerating the action of at least one of said at least one pH-lowering agents comprises one or more of erythorbate and ascorbic acid.

67. (Previously presented) A meat product according to claim 1, wherein the meat product is cooked.

68. (Canceled)

69. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 34, further comprising cooking the meat product after contacting said meat derived from said dark-cutting carcass with an amount of at least one pH-lowering agent.

70. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 50, further comprising cooking the meat product after contacting said meat derived from said dark-cutting bovine carcass with an amount of at least one pH-lowering agent.